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Former Resident of Maryland Sentenced for Using Fraud in Attempted Theft of 377 Books from Library of Congress

Washington, D.C. - Vince Edward Karl Wells was sentenced today for using fraud to steal books from the Library of Congress, announced U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr. and Karl W. Schornagel, Inspector General for the Library of Congress. Wells, 42, formerly of Maryland, but currently living in Georgia, previously pled guilty to a misdemeanor count of Theft of Government Property. He was sentenced in U.S. District Court in the District of Columbia by the Honorable Magistrate Judge Alan Kay to three years of probation.

According to evidence presented by the government at the plea hearing, the Library of Congress had a Surplus Book Program through which it had books available for donation, but only to qualifying educational institutions, public bodies and nonprofit tax-exempt organizations in the United States. An explicit condition of the program was that the books could not be sold for any reason; that is, the program's purpose was to build library collections, not support fund raising. To apply for books from this program, an applicant was directed by the Library to "have your director, dean, or president write and sign a letter on official stationery addressed to" the Head of the Acquisitions Fiscal and Support Office at the Library. Furthermore, an applicant was told to "[c]learly state in the letter that your organization is a non-profit/educational organization and wishes to participate in the Surplus Book Program" and directed to "provide the name of the person or persons who would be selecting books on its behalf." Finally, participants in the program were informed that they "must arrange for the shipping of the selected books."

On July 30, 2009, Wells arrived at the Library with a letter addressed to the Library's Acquisitions Fiscal and Support Office allegedly from the head of an organization called "The Book Exchange." The letter stated that The Book Exchange, an alleged adult literacy program, wanted to obtain books for its program. The letter also alleged that Wells was a representative for the organization and would be the one to interact with the Library on behalf of The Book Exchange. After providing the letter to the Library staff, Wells set aside approximately 139 books which he selected from the Library. Wells asked the staff if he could return the next day to provide postage to mail the books, to which the staff agreed.

On July 31, 2009, Wells returned to the Library and asked the Library staff to box up the approximately 139 books he previously selected. While the staff did so, Wells selected approximately 211 more books which were also placed in boxes. Wells placed pre-marked address labels, from a private law firm at which he worked in Washington, D.C. ("the Law Firm"), on the boxes addressed to his home. Wells took approximately 27 additional books with him personally when he left the Library and he asked the Library staff to ship the remaining 350 boxed books to him. The Library did not mail the boxed books, however, because of instructions from the Librarian who suspected there were some issues regarding Wells alleged nonprofit literacy program.

On August 10, 2009, Special Agents of the Library's Office of Inspector General ("OIG") interviewed Wells about his participation in the Library's Surplus Book Program. Wells admitted that was not part of a nonprofit literacy group. An OIG agent asked Wells to return the 27 books he had taken from the Library, to which Wells agreed. The next day, Wells admitted to OIG agents that he worked at the Law Firm, that that is where he obtained the mailing labels, and that he had intended to sell the books on the internet site, Amazon.com. Wells returned 23 books to the OIG agents, as was requested the prior day from Wells. When the agents pointed out he had taken 27 books from the Library, Wells said he would return the remaining four on the next day, which he did.

On August 12, 2009, the OIG agents also interviewed a contractor in the Library's Acquisition and Fiscal Support Office regarding her dealings with Wells. The contractor had been approached by Wells who told the contractor she could be his business partner selling surplus Library books. Wells told the contractor that she could pick out the books and mail them to him so Wells could sell them on Amazon.com, and that there was a lot of money to be made. The contractor told Wells she could not participate in that proposed plan.

When the OIG agents checked Wells' internet seller's name, they saw numerous items for sale, including law books, office supplies, computer printer ink cartridges, toner cartridges, paper and binders. When the agents went to the Law Firm, on August 13, 2009, personnel there identified a number of these items being sold that were identical to office supplies which that office used. They also identified a type of binder that was listed for sale on the site which was specific to the Law Firm and a special-order item for the Law Firm.

In announcing today's sentence, U.S. Attorney Machen and Inspector General Schornagel praised the hard work of the investigative agents involved in this matter, especially Assistant Inspector General of Investigations, Kenneth Keeler and Special Agent Hugh Coughlin of that same office. They also acknowledged the efforts of Paralegal Specialist Mary Treanor, as well as Assistant U.S. Attorney Daniel Butler, who prosecuted this matter.

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